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British spy volunteer convicted

LONDON — A jury convicted British intelligence officer Michael John Bettaney yesterday on charges that he tried to become a Soviet spy, and a judge sentenced him to 23 years in prison.

Bettaney, 34, a middle-echelon officer in Britain's MI5 counter-espionage agency who offered to work for the Soviets on ideological grounds, showed no emotion as the 12-member jury announced its verdict of guilty on 10 counts of violating the Official Secrets Act.

He stared straight ahead as Britain's Chief Justice Lord Lane, in passing sentence, told him: "You would not have hesitated to disclose names to the Russians which would almost certainly have led to death for more than one person."

The Oxford-educated son of a factory cleaning man, Bettaney was accused of volunteering three times to serve as a double agent for the Soviet Union shortly after joining MI5 in 1982. Prosecutors said the Soviets rejected his offer.